

Falls – A Minnesota and National Public Health Concern

- Falls are the number one cause of trauma deaths, non-fatal major trauma and other trauma care in Minnesota. The vast majority of these cases are among older Minnesotans.
- Minnesota's fall death rate is almost twice the national average and it is increasing. Every hour an older adult dies as the result of a fall.
- The total costs for non-fatal falls among Minnesotans 65 years of age and older were \$162 million for hospital charges and \$20.4 million for emergency department charges in 2005.
- Hip fractures are among the most serious fall-related injuries. Twenty percent die within the first year post-fracture, half never regain their previous level of functioning, and many are unable to live independently after their injury.
- Falls among the elderly are driving health care costs and significantly impacting quality of life for our older adults.

The Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative

The Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative was launched in response to this serious public health concern. The Minnesota Board on Aging and the Departments of Health and Human Services are partnering with numerous public and private organizations to undertake a statewide coordinated evidence-based falls prevention initiative.

The vision for the Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative is that older Minnesotans will have fewer falls and fall-related injuries, maximizing their independence and quality of life.

Falls are not inevitable. We can each play a part in reducing the risk for falls in older Minnesotans. This document was developed by the Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative partners to guide state efforts. It also provides a framework for communities, organizations and individuals to take action to prevent falls in older Minnesotans. The framework outlines the key components of an effective falls prevention effort. The goal of the framework is to make it easy for communities, organizations and individuals to identify their role in preventing falls and to coordinate their efforts with others in their communities.

Objective #1: Increase awareness of preventing falls.

Falling is not a normal part of aging and it is not inevitable. Although falls can occur anytime, anyplace and to anyone while doing normal everyday activities. There are simple steps that individuals can take that have been proven to reduce the chance of falling.

Strategy A: Educate older adults and their family members about steps that they can take to reduce the risk of falling.

Strategy B: Educate service professionals who interact with older adults and their family members about steps that they can take to reduce fall risk of older adults.

Objective #2: Increase assessment of fall risk.

Research shows that the most effective type of fall prevention intervention is one that is tailored to an individual's specific risk factors for falls. It is essential to assess an older adult's risk for falls in order to connect them with resources that they can use to reduce their risk.

Strategy A: Educate service professionals about valid and objective fall risk assessment tools that they can incorporate into their existing work with older adults.

Strategy B: Educate professionals about information sources that they can tap to learn about other falls prevention resources to which they can refer.

Objective #3: Increase the availability of evidence-based interventions statewide.

Evidence-based health promotion interventions are those that have been proven to produce the desired health outcome in participants. It is critical to implement these types of interventions as much as possible in order to make the most strategic use of our existing resources. We must also support the efforts of existing programs to improve the quality of their service by shifting towards evidence-based approaches as much as possible. The goal is to make high quality interventions that address all fall risk factors available in as many communities around the state as possible.

Research shows that the most effective falls prevention intervention involves an assessment of fall risk combined with individualized fall risk reduction and follow-up. This type of intervention is multi-factorial given the nature of fall risk. These types of interventions are found to be most effective for those individuals who are at high risk for falls due their fall history and/or the presence of multiple risk factors.

The most effective single intervention is exercise. Exercise programs that include gait and balance exercises as well as lower body strengthening exercises have been proven to reduce fall rates in older adults. Evidence-based exercise programs have been proven beneficial to older adults who are at low risk for falls and thus provide a cost-effective broad-based prevention strategy.

Strategy A: Disseminate evidence-based multi-factor falls prevention interventions that combine fall risk assessment with individualized fall risk reduction and follow-up.

Strategy B: Disseminate evidence-based exercise interventions that include gait, balance and lower-body strengthening exercises.

Objective #4: Measure the impact of our efforts to prevent falls in older Minnesotans.

It is important to monitor our progress in preventing falls in older Minnesotans. We must utilize this data to inform our effort and make adjustments as necessary. At the individual level, we need to measure the impact of our interventions on participants' risk for falls. At the systems level, we need to measure the impact of our overall effort on the statewide fall rate. In both situations, we have strong existing efforts to build on and learn from.

Strategy A: Facilitate more widespread collection of outcome data of participants in falls prevention interventions.

Strategy B: Build on existing data collection efforts related to fall injury and mortality rates, circumstances of falls, and characteristics of individuals who fall.

What you can do –

- ⇒ **Sign-up for the statewide falls prevention listserv.** The listserv is a vehicle to share information related to the falls prevention initiative. To subscribe to the listserv, please visit:
<http://mailman.stpaul.visi.com/mailman/listinfo/fallsprevention>
- ⇒ **Visit the Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative website at www.mnfallsprevention.org.** The website contains more detailed information related to conducting fall risk screenings and assessments, implementing falls prevention interventions in your community, linking community efforts, and disseminating consumer education material.
- ⇒ **Explore ways that you can be an effective partner in reducing falls in Minnesota.** Every organization or individual that works with or provides services to older Minnesotans has an important role to play. The role you can play may involve screening or assessing older adults, providing referrals to community resources, or helping to implement an intervention. By working together, community partners can develop a comprehensive fall prevention strategy. Potential partners include the Area Agency on Aging, local public health and human services, hospitals, emergency medical services, local health care clinics, home care agencies, senior housing, nursing homes, physical therapists, occupational therapists, fitness centers, senior and community centers, Parish Nurse, Faith in Action, Living at Home Block Nurse Programs, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Senior Companion Program, and many others.

Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative State Partners

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota	Minnesota Department of Health
Brain Injury Association of Minnesota	Minnesota Department of Human Services
Fairview Ridges Hospital	Minnesota Health and Housing Alliance
First Plan of Minnesota	Minnesota Home Care Association
HealthPartners	Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association
Mayo Clinic	Minnesota Safety Council
Metropolitan Health Plan	Stratis Health
Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging	UCare Minnesota
Minnesota Board on Aging	University of Minnesota, School of Gerontological Nursing
Minnesota Chapter, American Physical Therapy Association	Volunteers of America